

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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| Colvin Preston Washington, #1021146, |) C/A No. 0:07-3096-GRA-BM |
| |) |
| Plaintiff, |) |
| |) |
| vs. |) Report and Recommendation |
| |) |
| Arie D. Bax; and |) |
| Lexington County Defender Agency, |) |
| |) |
| Defendants. |) |

This is a civil action filed *pro se* by a detainee at the Lexington County Detention Center, where is awaiting trial in the Lexington County General Sessions Court on undisclosed criminal charges. In the Complaint filed in this case, Plaintiff complains about the level of service he is receiving from Defendant Bax, his court-appointed criminal defense counsel. He asks that Bax be removed from his case and that new defense counsel be appointed for him. Plaintiff does not indicate whether or not he has asked the state court judge assigned to his criminal case to appoint him new counsel.

Under established local procedure in this judicial district, a careful review has been made of Plaintiff's *pro se* Complaint pursuant to the procedural provisions of 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915, 1915A, the Prison Litigation Reform Act of 1996, and in light of the following precedents: *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25 (1992); *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 324-25 (1989); *Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519 (1972); *Nasim v. Warden, Md. House of Corr.*, 64 F.3d 951 (4th Cir. 1995)(*en banc*); *Todd v. Baskerville*, 712 F.2d 70 (4th Cir. 1983); *Boyce v. Alizaduh*, 595 F.2d 948 (4th Cir. 1979).

Pro se complaints are held to a less stringent standard than those drafted by attorneys, *Gordon v. Leake*, 574 F.2d 1147, 1151 (4th Cir. 1978), and a federal district court is charged with liberally construing a complaint filed by a *pro se* litigant to allow the development of a potentially meritorious case. *Erickson v. Pardus*, ___ U.S. ___, 127 S. Ct. 2197 (2007); *Hughes v. Rowe*, 449 U.S. 5, 9-10 & n.7 (1980); *Cruz v. Beto*, 405 U.S. 319 (1972); *Fine v. City of N. Y.*, 529 F.2d 70, 74 (2d Cir. 1975). Even considered under this less



stringent standard, however, the Complaint filed in this case is subject to summary dismissal under the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B). The requirement of liberal construction does not mean that this Court can ignore a clear failure in the pleading to allege facts which set forth a claim currently cognizable in a federal district court. *Weller v. Dep't of Social Servs.*, 901 F.2d 387(4th Cir. 1990).

First, absent extraordinary circumstances, federal courts are not authorized to interfere with a state's pending criminal proceedings. *See, e.g., Younger v. Harris*, 401 U.S. 37, 44 (1971); *Taylor v. Taintor*, 83 U.S. (16 Wall.) 366, 370 & n.8 (1873)¹; *Harkrader v. Wadley*, 172 U.S. 148, 169-70 (1898); *Cinema Blue of Charlotte, Inc. v. Gilchrist*, 887 F.2d 49, 50-53 (4th Cir. 1989). In *Cinema Blue of Charlotte, Inc. v. Gilchrist*, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit ruled that federal district courts should abstain from constitutional challenges to state judicial proceedings, no matter how meritorious, if the federal claims have been or could be presented in an ongoing state judicial proceeding. 887 F.2d at 52. Moreover, the Anti-Injunction Act, 28 U.S.C. § 2283, expressly prohibits this court from enjoining such proceedings. *Bonner v. Circuit Ct. of St. Louis*, 526 F.2d 1331, 1336 (8th Cir. 1975). In *Bonner*, the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit pointed out that federal constitutional claims are cognizable in both state courts and in federal courts, and that "Congress and the federal courts have consistently recognized that federal courts should permit state courts to try state cases, and that, where constitutional issues arise, state court judges are fully competent to handle them subject to Supreme Court review." *Id.*; *see also D.C. Court of Appeals v. Feldman*, 460 U.S. 462, 476 (1983) (federal courts cannot review state court proceedings in an appellate sense); *Gurley v. Superior Court of Mecklenburg County*, 411 F.2d 586, 587-88 (4th Cir. 1969) (federal courts may not issue writs of mandamus against state courts); *Craig v. Hey*, 624 F. Supp. 414 (S.D.W. Va. 1985) (same).

¹Although the Supreme Court of the United States has not overruled *Taylor v. Taintor*, an unrelated portion of the decision in *Taylor v. Taintor*, which concerned the right of sureties to apprehend principals, has been superannuated by statute in Texas. *See Green v. State*, 829 S.W.2d 222, 223 (Tex. Crim. App. 1992) ("However, *Taylor* is not the law in Texas.").

As stated above, the only relief requested by Plaintiff in this case is injunctive in nature, *i.e.*, that his current defense counsel be replaced. In order for this Court to grant such relief, it would have to violate *Younger* principles and interfere with the state court proceedings in Plaintiff's criminal case because it is only within those proceedings that court-appointed defense counsel may withdraw or be changed. Since this Court cannot grant the relief requested, this case should be summarily dismissed.

Furthermore, even if this Court were not prohibited by *Younger* and its progeny from considering Plaintiff's claims, this case would still be subject to summary dismissal because there is no federal subject matter jurisdiction over Plaintiff's claims about his lawyer's services. In order for this Court to hear and decide a case, the Court must, first, have jurisdiction over the subject matter of the litigation. It is well settled that federal courts are courts of limited jurisdiction, possessing only that power authorized by Constitution and statute, *Willy v. Coastal Corp.*, 503 U.S. 131, 136-37 (1992); *Bender v. Williamsport Area School Dist.*, 475 U.S. 534, 541 (1986), and which is not to be expanded by judicial decree, *American Fire & Casualty Co. v. Finn*, 341 U.S. 6 (1951). Further, it is to be presumed that a cause lies outside this limited jurisdiction, *Turner v. Bank of N. Am.*, 4 U.S. (4 Dall.) 8, 11 (1799), and the burden of establishing the contrary rests upon the party asserting jurisdiction, *McNutt v. Gen. Motors Acceptance Corp.*, 298 U.S. 178, 182-83 (1936).

The two most commonly recognized and utilized bases for federal court jurisdiction are (1) "federal question," 28 U.S.C. § 1331, and (2) "diversity of citizenship." 28 U.S.C. § 1332. There is clearly no basis for a finding of diversity jurisdiction over this Complaint, as the diversity statute, 28 U.S.C. § 1332(a), requires complete diversity of parties and an amount in controversy in excess of seventy-five thousand dollars (\$75,000.00):

(a) The district courts shall have original jurisdiction of all civil actions where the matter in controversy exceeds the sum or value of \$75,000, exclusive of interest and costs, and is between—

(1) citizens of different States[.]



28 U.S.C. § 1332 (emphasis added). Complete diversity of parties in a case means that no party on one side may be a citizen of the same state as any party on the other side. *Owen Equip. & Erection Co. v. Kroger*, 437 U.S. 365, 372-74 (1978). This Court has no diversity jurisdiction over this case because, according to the information provided by Plaintiff, he and both Defendants are residents of South Carolina.² Also, since Plaintiff only seeks injunctive relief under his Complaint, the \$75,000 jurisdictional amount for a diversity action is not in controversy.

It is also clear that the allegations contained in the Complaint are insufficient to show that the case is one “arising under the Constitution, laws, or treaties of the United States.” 28 U.S.C. § 1331. That is, the Complaint does not state a claim cognizable under this Court’s “federal question” jurisdiction. Plaintiff’s Complaint involves his dissatisfaction with legal services in the nature of a legal malpractice claim. Generally, such negligence-based legal malpractice cases are a matter of state law to be heard in the state courts, unless diversity of citizenship is present. *See, e.g., Mitchell v. Holler*, 311 S.C. 406, 429 S.E.2d 793 (1993); *Yarborough v. Rogers*, 306 S.C. 260, 411 S.E.2d 424 (1991). Further, although Plaintiff’s allegations do not contain any specific reference to a violation of any federal statute or constitutional provision by Defendants, even if Plaintiff had made assertions that his federal rights were violated, this Court would not be bound by such allegations and would be entitled to disregard them if the facts did not support Plaintiff’s contentions. *Lyon v. Centimark Corp.*, 805 F. Supp. 333, 334-35 (E.D.N.C. 1992) (When considering the issue of whether a case is one “arising under the Constitution . . .” or, in other words, whether “federal question” jurisdiction is present, a federal court is not bound by the parties’ characterization of a case. District courts are authorized to disregard such characterizations to avoid “unjust manipulation or avoidance of its jurisdiction.”); see *Louisville & Nashville R.R. v. Mottley*, 211 U.S. 149 (1908); *cf. Gully v. First Nat’l Bank in Meridian*, 299 U.S. 109 (1936) (“Not every question of federal law emerging

² Even though one Defendant appears to be a corporate or business entity and not a human being, it is still a “resident” of South Carolina as that term is legally understood. *See Huggins v. Winn-Dixie Greenville, Inc.*, 233 F.Supp. 667 , 669 (D.S.C. 1964).

in a suit is proof that a federal law is the basis of the suit."); *Bonner v. Circuit Ct. of St. Louis*, 526 F.2d 1331, 1336 (8th Cir. 1975)(federal constitutional claims are cognizable in both state courts and in federal courts: "Congress and the federal courts have consistently recognized that federal courts should permit state courts to try state cases, and that, where constitutional issues arise, state court judges are fully competent to handle them subject to Supreme Court review.").

Finally, even if there was a proper jurisdictional basis for maintaining this case in this Court, criminal defense performance disputes such as that presented in Plaintiff's Complaint are not actionable under 42 U.S.C. § 1983³ or under the Fourteenth Amendment, the two most common provisions under which persons come into federal court to claim that others have violated their constitutional rights. *See Lugar v. Edmondson Oil Co.*, 457 U.S. 922, 936 (1982); *Burton v. Wilmington Parking Auth.*, 365 U.S. 715, 721 (1961). In order to state a cause of action under § 1983, a plaintiff must allege that: (1) the defendant(s) deprived him or her of a federal right, and (2) did so under color of state law. *Gomez v. Toledo*, 446 U.S. 635, 640 (1980); see *Hall v. Quillen*, 631 F.2d 1154, 1155-56 & nn. 2-3 (4th Cir. 1980). Because the United States Constitution regulates only the Government, not private parties, a litigant claiming that his constitutional rights have been violated must first establish that the challenged conduct constitutes "state action." *See, e.g., Blum v. Yaretsky*, 457 U.S. 991, 1002 (1982). To qualify as state action, the conduct in question "must be caused by the exercise of some right or privilege created by the State or by a rule of conduct imposed by the State or by a person for whom the State is responsible," and "the party charged with the [conduct] must be a person who may fairly be said to be a state actor." *Lugar v. Edmondson Oil Co.*, 457 U.S. at 937; see *U. S. v. Int'l Brotherhood of Teamsters, Chauffeurs, Warehousemen Helpers of Am.*,

³Section 1983 is the procedural mechanism through which Congress provided a private civil cause of action based on allegations of federal constitutional violations by persons acting under color of state law. *Jennings v. Davis*, 476 F.2d 1271 (8th Cir. 1973). The purpose of § 1983 is to deter state actors from using badge of their authority to deprive individuals of their *federally guaranteed* rights and to provide relief to victims if such deterrence fails. *McKnight v. Rees*, 88 F.3d 417(6th Cir. 1996)(emphasis added).

AFL-CIO, 941 F.2d 1292 (2d Cir.1991). It is well settled that a criminal defense attorney, whether retained, court-appointed, or a public defender, does not act under color of state law. *See Deas v. Potts*, 547 F.2d 800 (4th Cir. 1976)(private attorney); *Hall v. Quillen*, 631 F.2d 1154, 1155-56 (4th Cir. 1980)(court-appointed attorney); *Polk County v. Dodson*, 454 U.S. 312, 317-24 (1981)(public defender); *see also Lugar v. Edmondson Oil Co.*, 457 U.S. at 936 ("Careful adherence to the 'state action' requirement . . . also avoids imposing on the State, its agencies or officials, responsibility for conduct for which they cannot fairly be blamed."). Therefore, no proper § 1983 claim has been presented.

Recommendation

Accordingly, it is recommended that the Court dismiss the Complaint in this case *without prejudice* and without issuance and service of process. *See Denton v. Hernandez; Neitzke v. Williams; Haines v. Kerner; Brown v. Briscoe*, 998 F.2d 201, 202-04 (4th Cir. 1993); *Boyce v. Alizaduh; Todd v. Baskerville*, 712 F.2d at 74; *see also* 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B); 28 U.S.C. § 1915A (as soon as possible after docketing, district courts should review prisoner cases to determine whether they are subject to summary dismissal).

Plaintiff's attention is directed to the important notice on the next page.



Bristow Marchant
United States Magistrate Judge

September 18, 2007
Columbia, South Carolina



Notice of Right to File Objections to Report and Recommendation

The parties are advised that they may file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation with the District Court Judge. Objections must specifically identify the portions of the Report and Recommendation to which objections are made and the basis for such objections. In the absence of a timely filed objection, a district court judge need not conduct a de novo review, but instead must "only satisfy itself that there is no clear error on the face of the record in order to accept the recommendation." *Diamond v. Colonial Life & Acc. Ins. Co.*, 416 F.3d 310 (4th Cir. 2005).

Specific written objections must be filed within ten (10) days of the date of service of this Report and Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b). The time calculation of this ten-day period excludes weekends and holidays and provides for an additional three (3) days for filing by mail. Fed. R. Civ. P. 6(a) & (e). Filing by mail pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 5 may be accomplished by mailing objections to:

Larry W. Propes, Clerk
United States District Court
901 Richland Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Failure to timely file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation will result in waiver of the right to appeal from a judgment of the District Court based upon such Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); *Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140 (1985); *United States v. Schronce*, 727 F.2d 91 (4th Cir. 1984); *Wright v. Collins*, 766 F.2d 841 (4th Cir. 1985).

